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UNCLAS COLOMBO 002046

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR SA/INS, CA/OCS

E.O. 12958: DECL: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: Sri Lanka: Muslim-Sinhalese riot in Colombo
leaves one dead; tensions continue to smolder

1. (U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified --
Please handle accordingly.

2. (SBU) On the afternoon of October 30, a riot erupted in Maligawatte, a northern suburb of Colombo, between Sinhalese and Muslim residents. The initial dispute reportedly began when Sinhalese locals protested against the start of construction of what was apparently a mosque. One person died during the riot, reportedly from a rubber bullet fired by the police, and approximately 20 others were injured. A number of vehicles and buildings (included the home of one FSN) were reported burnt down. The police imposed a curfew, and the military assisted in enforcing it, from 4pm October 30, until 6am the following morning. As of late afternoon October 31, confrontations between the two communities continued; the police have imposed another curfew. The clash between the Muslims and Sinhalese does not appear linked to the peace process.

3. (SBU) One American citizen (Amcit), a Mission Warden, residing in Maligawatte phoned Conoff on the afternoon of October 30 advising him that rioting was taking place outside his home and that rioters were breaking into surrounding houses. Conoff kept the Amcit on the line, calming him, while the RSO coordinated with local police to ensure protection of the property. The police guarded the house for the remainder of the night and withdrew the next morning. There was no reported damage to the Amcit's residence after the police arrived; windows were broken earlier in the day.

4. (U) Mission sent the following message to the American Community through the Warden Network on October 30:

BEGIN TEXT:

Riots broke out today between Muslim and Sinhalese faction in the Maligawatte section of greater Colombo. There have also been clashes reported in the Borella section. Police have rerouted traffic northbound out of Colombo, toward the airport, through Kaduwela and across the Kaduwela Bridge, about 15 miles southeast of Colombo. Traffic through this area is very heavy. Police have announced a curfew in those areas and the surrounding areas. The army has deployed to restore order in the Maligawatte area. Spontaneous riots could start in other areas.

The Embassy urges all Americans in Sri Lanka to abide by any local curfew. Because violence might erupt quickly, we urge you to be especially aware of what is going on around you. If violence erupts in your area, you should remain in your homes, if possible. Please feel free to contact the Embassy (448-601) if you see violence erupt in your area. The Embassy will send other messages as the situation develops.

END TEXT.

WILLS